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## Book Reviews

***Unlikely Collaboration: Gertrude Stein, Bernard Faÿ, and the Vichy Dilemma.* Barbara Will. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011. Pp. xviii + 274. \$35.00 (cloth).**

**Reviewed by Sarah Posman, FWO / Ghent University**

Stein studies is a somewhat curious field in that it is relatively small yet highly diversified. There is a discrepancy between the reputation Gertrude Stein enjoys, as a major modernist writer, and the scholarly output on her work. Although it is true, as Will points out in the opening pages of her book, that scholarly attention for Stein is on the rise, to date only some seventy studies have been published with “Gertrude Stein” in the title. Few of these focus on Stein’s poetic development. Because Stein tackled so many genres—she wrote poetry, fiction, essays, portraits and (auto)biographies, plays, libretti, and film scenarios, as well as children’s stories and a single mystery novel—and because the story of her life is so fascinating, her work has been the subject of many different interpretations. That is not a bad thing. The avant-garde Stein, the modernist Stein, the cubist Stein, the queer Stein, the Jewish Stein, the feminist Stein, the scientific Stein, the pragmatic Stein, and Stein the proto-deconstructionist can all coexist. At its best, this myriad of perspectives points to the rich dialogue that exists between Stein’s literary thinking and a range of cultural, artistic, scientific, and philosophical traditions. At its worst, it shows critics using Stein’s work, which is at once intangible and a resource of such alluringly catchy phrases as “the difference is spreading,” as an illustration for particular theories or causes not necessarily emerging from the texts themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Since few books have been written on Stein as Stein, this new book, which intends to make sense of a strange episode in her career—Stein’s translations of the speeches by the Vichy marshal Philippe Pétain—is something of an event. This is especially so because it’s by Barbara Will, who has shown in her first book, *Gertrude Stein: Modernism and the Problem of Genius* (2000), as well as in several essays, that she’s an intelligent and careful reader of Stein’s work—one, furthermore, who looks beyond the iconic texts. In *Unlikely Collaboration* Will revisits her earlier aesthetic approach to Stein. “Piqued and troubled” (11) by Stein’s Pétain translations, she sets out to understand Stein’s political views over the course of the interwar period. These translations are not exactly

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194 blank scholarly territory—they crop up in early biographies, there is the 1996 article “Portrait of a National Fetish” by Wanda Van Dusen, the appendix on Stein’s war years in Ulla Dydo and Edward Burns’s *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Thornton Wilder*, the essay “The Surrender to Ethos” by Patrick Shaw, and Janet Malcolm’s popularizing account in *Two Lives*—but Will is right that the question of how these reactionary pieces relate to Stein’s radical, open-ended literary experiments of the 1910s and 1920s deserves more attention (15).<sup>2</sup> Apart from the much-discussed link between Stein and the European artistic scene, headed by Picasso, little research has been conducted on the relations between Stein’s life in Europe and her poetics. It is not Stein’s poetics, however, on which *Unlikely Collaboration* turns the spotlight.

As the beautiful cover design signals, Will’s book is very much the story of two friends: Gertrude Stein and Bernard Faÿ. Will’s sketch of their remarkable, interlaced fates offers us an enthralling perspective on the reactionary climate in 1930s France and on the difficult and delicate issue of collaboration in the period. Faÿ, Americophile, professor at the Collège de France, head of the National Library, and wartime collaborator, is staged as the missing link in understanding Stein’s political views. As a portrait of a friendship, the book is a wonderful read. The first three chapters discuss Stein and Faÿ in tandem, from the aftermath of the First World War, in which both had played an active role, over the late twenties and early thirties, which saw the consolidation of their friendship, to the late thirties and their changing outlook on America. In the two chapters that make up part two they each live their own war; Stein sitting out the events in the French countryside and Faÿ becoming more and more involved in the Vichy machinery—and, from that position, controlling Stein and Toklas’s fate. Will elegantly narrates these stories against the background of French politics and French-American relations, while the stunning amount of research that has gone into the book enables her to draw conclusions that are well-founded and nuanced. Drawing on the speeches, on publications by or on Stein in extreme right journals, on letters exchanged between Stein and Faÿ, and on an understanding of Stein’s position in the conservative, rural region where she and Toklas spent the war years, Will shows that Stein’s support for the Vichy regime was not merely opportunistic but also about “loyalty to a cause” (143). Although she makes much of the assumption that “reactionary thinking would hold little attention for progressive modernist intellectuals and artists” (15)—many studies have mapped the ways in which modernism and totalitarianism entwine—it is an important conclusion. That said, Will’s focus on the political context and on the figure of Faÿ leaves little room for Stein’s writing.

On the relatively few occasions that Will engages with Stein’s work she touches on some very interesting issues. In chapter four, notably, she briefly discusses Stein’s fascination with saints in order to make the point that “Stein’s ability to pass as a Christian believer—however ambiguous, ironic or layered it may seem in her writing—may well have contributed to her long-term survival” (128). That may be so but the interesting question here pertains to the ways in which Stein deals with Christianity in her writing. What does her ambiguous, ironic, or layered writing on saints tell us about her poetic development? How does it relate to the French avant-garde’s interest in saints? In what ways does it intersect with contemporaneous (French) writings on religion? At the end of the book, moreover, Will lifts out *In Savoy; or, Yes Is for a Very Young Man* as “a unique text in Stein’s oeuvre” because it foregrounds “multiple and often contradictory perspectives, putting on display the ‘gray zone’ of life during wartime” (190). This is a bold claim. Not only does Stein focus on the contradictions and anxieties of everyday life in quite a few of her 1930s and 1940s texts, she also deals with a variety of points of view in *Wars I Have Seen*. In *Wars I Have Seen*, of which Will highlights the double consciousness, Stein deals with the fact that what matters in war is survival.<sup>3</sup> Here she writes on Pétain: “so many points of view about him, so very many. I had lots of them. I was almost French in having so many.”<sup>4</sup> Life, the precious, manifold everydayness of it, becomes a vital issue in Stein’s writings of the 1930s and during the Second World War. This issue begs detailed critical exploration. Of course, in order to do so, one needs to know about Faÿ and the Vichy dilemma—that story Will tells commendably.

## Notes

1. Gertrude Stein, "Tender Buttons," in *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1903–1932*, edited by Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: Library of America, 1998), 313.
2. Richard Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 316–318; Janet Hobhouse, *Everybody Who Was Anybody: A Biography of Gertrude Stein* (New York: Putnam, 1975), 202; Wanda Van Dusen and Michael Davidson, "Portrait of a National Fetish: Gertrude Stein's 'Introduction to the Speeches of Maréchal Pétain' (1942)," *Modernism/Modernity* 3.3 (1996): 69–96; Edward Burns and Ulla Dydo, "Appendix IX. Gertrude Stein: September 1942–1944," in *The Letters of Gertrude Stein & Thornton Wilder*, edited by Edward Burns and Ulla Dydo, with William Rice (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 401–421; Patrick Shaw, "The Surrender to Ethos: Gertrude Stein's 'Introduction to the Speeches of Maréchal Pétain,'" in *Chasing Esther: Jewish Expressions of Cultural Difference*, edited and with an introduction by David Metzger and Peter Schulman (Santa Monica, CA; Norfolk, VA; Mount Carmel, Israel: Kol Katan; Institute for Jewish Studies and Interfaith Understanding; University of Haifa, 2005), 9–31; Janet Malcolm, *Two Lives: Gertrude and Alice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).
3. See Joan Retallack, "Introduction," in *Gertrude Stein: Selections*, edited and with an introduction by Joan Retallack (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 64.
4. Gertrude Stein, *Wars I Have Seen* (New York: Random House, 1945), 53.

**Culture in Camouflage. Patrick Deer. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. xii + 329. \$125.00 (cloth).**

**Media, Memory, and the First World War. David Williams. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009. Pp. xii + 321. \$59.95 (cloth); \$29.95 (paper).**

**Reviewed by Debra Rae Cohen, University of South Carolina**

These two imperfect but fascinating books—each hugely ambitious, each offering a model that only partially contains its material, each implicitly addressing the lacunae of the other—meet on the plane of war and representation. David Williams argues that film precipitated, in the First World War, a new kind of cinematic remembering, in which visual images of the past catapulted violently into the present; Patrick Deer deploys a potent set of visual tropes—blackout, camouflage, oversight—to trace the growth of war culture, and literary resistance to it, in the years and the war that followed. Though Deer's book is by far the more satisfying and substantial, both books show the extent to which the study of war literature and war culture has become increasingly nuanced and theoretically inflected over the past decade and more.

Williams has in the past been a sensitive commentator on the relations of media and literature; his 2003 book, *Imagined Nations: Reflections on Media in Canadian Fiction*, deftly negotiated both the problems of tracing a mediated nationhood and the McLuhanesque paradox of doing so in print. Much like this one, that book cast a wide net, harking back to the *Aeneid* to make claims for the entwined genealogy of communications and community. Here, he begins with Homer's Achilles, spending two chapters discussing the transition from oral to written memorialization of the warrior figure before chronicling the unsettling advent of cinema. The new medium, he reminds us, "overturned familiar notions of temporality . . . for a past *actualité* appeared *actuellement* (at present), here and now, to invade the present, making the pastness of the past seem 'unnatural'" (109). This created, argues Williams, "a new verb tense in the grammar of existence